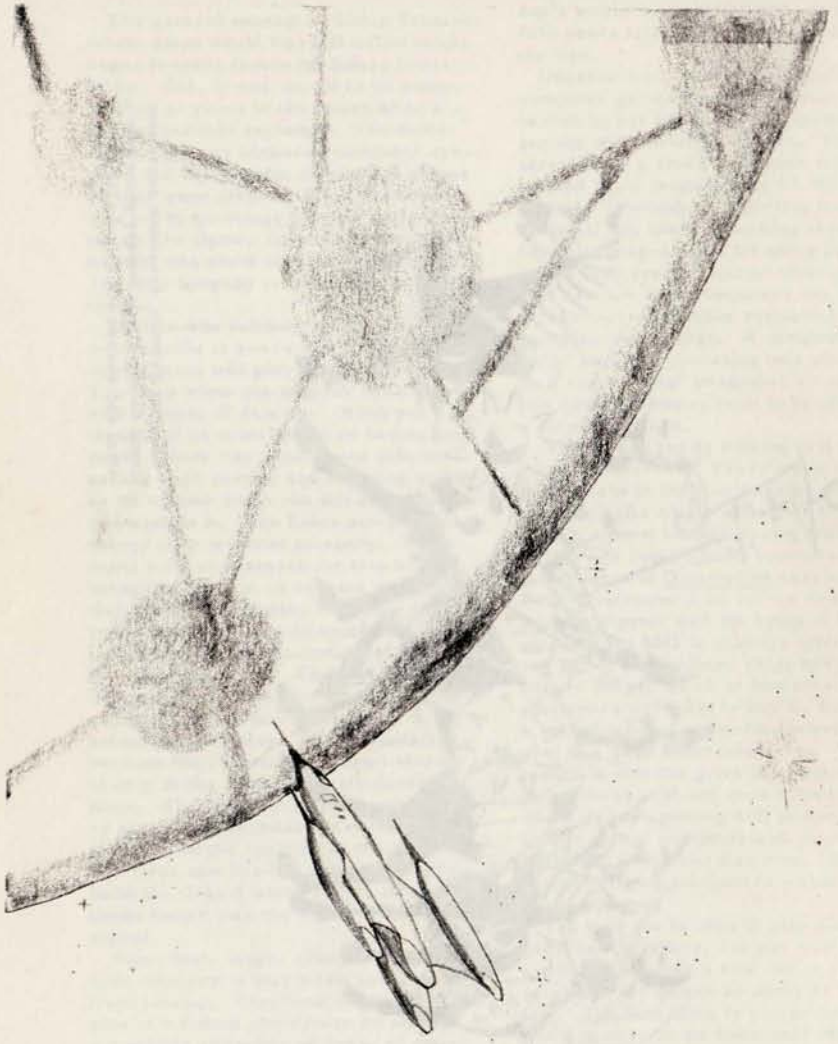
THE SPACE GAMER

Number #4 $1



John Hricz

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The Space Gamer is a quarterly publication of Metagaming Concepts devoted to Science Fiction and Fantasy gaming. Six issues $5, twelve issues $9, and a six issue renewal is $4.

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EDITORIAL

In the last year and a half I've spent a lot of time trying to formulate a useful mental construct of what TSG and Metagaming is all about. It might seem a bit ridiculous to look for basic meaning in something that's a going thing. But, as our efforts touch more and more people, it becomes progressively harder to define what's happening in terms useful for planning. Perhaps my broad lazy streak is just looking for a convenient label so it won't have to balance the diversity TSG has attracted. I'd like a simple sentence that clearly and completely says what s-f gaming does for us. That sentence shouldn't omit our readers forty year plus age range, male-female, wargame, fantasy, hard s-f, educational, occupational, and just plain curiosity characteristics. Somewhere there must exist a common thread that ties us together. I wish each of you could have the experience of going through our mail for a month. You'd revel in the variety, the multiple pluralisms of our readers. That multiplicity doesn't bug me, it's the inability to put my finger on the hub of s-f gaming's appeal that itches.

As you've no doubt guessed, I do have some ideas or I wouldn't write about it. Being confused doesn't stop me from hypothesizing, grasping at straws if you like. So far I see two elements common to s-f gamers. It's not the convenient simple sentence or a label but these two ideas help me tie things together.

The first element derives mostly from the science fiction aspect of s-f gaming. I think we all find some fasination in alternate realities that aren't bounded by current knowledge or constraints. I see us as feeling fettered, hemmed in by conventionality and the limit of man's current achievements. S-F and games are vehicles to carry our thoughts to experiences unavailable outside our own imaginings. Mostly we focus on the future as a source of alternate realities. The future is yet to be and may somehow unbind us from the present to live and do more fully. If we live long enough the future will certainly happen and the new possibilities attract and hold our imaginings.

The second area of relatedness is a desire for achievement. All S-F games, even role-playing games like DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS, contain a strong element of striving. Games provide players

"Whadda ya mean 'alternate' realities?"

an opportunity to manipulate and control a challenging imaginary environment. Games may or may not have direct competition or conflict. But a game must have obstacles, problems, and challenges or be miserably dull. We like to pit ourselves against challenging situations and achieve an outcome pleasing to our preferences.

No doubt I'll be deluged by those who don't see themselves seeking achievement or fascinated by alternate, mostly future, realities. I hope so because that's what I need to get this "commonality" concept ironed out or shot down. Man is a labeling animal despite how much we may personally dislike pigeonholes. We've all found ourselves at one time or another limited by labeling. Yet new labels that are meaningful descriptions of complex phenomenon provide us with powerful mental handles on reality. If 80% of the same meaning can be conveyed with three words where a half-dozen involved sentences were previously needed, we've gained ground. Man's struggle to survive through controlling the environment can be viewed as a chronicle of language concept development.

I'll continue looking for a common label for us. Most likely, our diversity will defeat the effort. That's why looking for a simple statement of what it is we get from S-F gaming seems more practical. Our commonality lies somewhere, I think, in the realm of imagined existences and boundless achievement. Our common labels lie in the enjoyment of a game's cognitive impact on our life. Such labels as "gamer," "fan," "dreamer," or such apply partially to most of us, but somehow miss the essence of our mutual experience.

"WHERE WE'RE GOING"

Planning ahead for TSG and Metagaming is made difficult when we don't know how high up is. Circulation and game sales are growing rapidly despite recent cut backs in promotional activity. The larger TSG's circulation becomes, the better job it can do for S-F gaming. But, the rate of growth will be smoothed. Erratic spurts in circulation disrupt design and TSG work too much.

Staff hours available will be expanded with new people. More time will be put into planning and developing new games and services. TSG will go to 32 pages with the feedback form and almost all advertising material as separate items. At 32 pages TSG will carry 22-24,000 words per issue, depending on the art work. TSG is scheduled quarterly for 1976, but if qualified assistance is found bimonthly publication may come before 1977. TSG may even gain a circulation that allows eight issues per year. The extra issues would come in the fall and spring. If some of our estimates of potential circulation aren't too far off, monthly issues may be possible in a few years. Because of some economic advantages of a standard 32 page format, our inclination is to publish more frequently rather than expand beyond 32 pages at least for the near future. At some point, there may also be occasional special topic supplemental issues that won't count against the regular subscription.

TSG's circulation also impacts game production. TSG's accounts for more games bought than stores and direct mail advertising combined. TSG subscribers are the most important market! The more subscribers the more and better S-F games. 1976 should tell us to dust off some of our pretty fantastic dream projects and figure out how to make them real or to be just another minor, if specialized, game publisher.

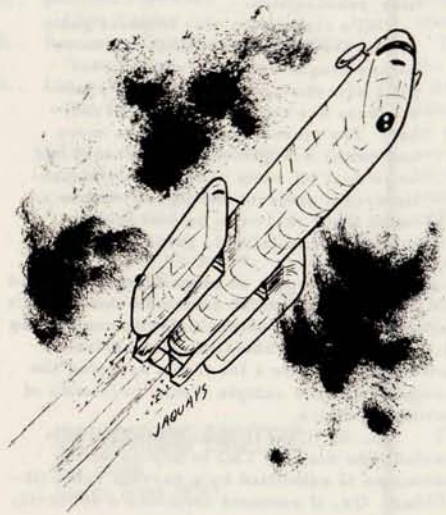
Word-of-Mouth: In issue #2 we mentioned that word-of-mouth referrals were an important source of new S-F gamers. Many don't learn of TSG from ads but from friends. Quite a lot of you accepted the offer to send sample issues to friends of subscribers.

So, we'll say it again. We'll send a sample issue of TSG to anyone whose name is submitted by a current subscriber. Or, if someone mentions a subscrib-

er by name and asks for a sample issue we'll send it. TSG is an easy way to show people what S-F gaming is all about at a hobby level. Quite a few groups of S-F fans discovered gaming in this manner, and we appreciate the plugs!

Game Design Contest: We had planned to conduct a SF&F game design contest but there wasn't sufficient interest to warrant the effort. The idea may be brought out of moth balls when our circulation is larger and we can publicize it properly. In the mean time, don't stop work on a design you may have wanted to enter. Non-staff designs are being published, so send anything you feel deserves consideration. Royalties may not make you rich, but they can pay for enjoying the hobby.

Hymenoptera: Our hive society in conflict game will be delayed until late in 1976. We want to publish some outside designs first. Delay also means possible return of a plastic map and full die-cut counters. The game is for 2 to 6 players, each controlling as insectoid culture city-state. Bio-technology plays the crucial role in Hymenopteran evolution similar to machine industrialization with man. Geneticists develop mutations to perform tasks as we design machines. Intense competition in food harvesting makes warrior mutations prevelant. The game is a complex and unique creation that deserves polishing and first class packaging.



TSG WANT LIST

TSG needs a variety of material for our pages. Readers already tell us what they'd like to see, now we need to get it written.

Artwork: We'll consider any sort of art based on sf&f games or space conflict themes. Art is photo-reduced from a 12"x7 1/2" layout to the standard page size. Column width is 3 1/2". Since some of our reproduction is only fair emphasize line drawings well contrasted and shaded. Payment is in cash convertible to credit depending on size and use.

Articles: Should be typed double-spaced. We'll look at neat printing but please don't be hurt if it's returned. Checking spelling, grammer, punctuation, and coherence increases clarity and chances for publication. Putting an article aside for a week or so then reading it again helps. If a delay leaves you confused or bored by what you originally wrote it needs improvement. Compensation is 1/2¢ per word cash or 1¢ per word purchase credit. When in doubt send it on, trying is the only way to find out. Some of our best material is from gamers who've taken the time to express an idea in simple english.

Subjects: Your own imagination is the best guide but we can use all of the following.

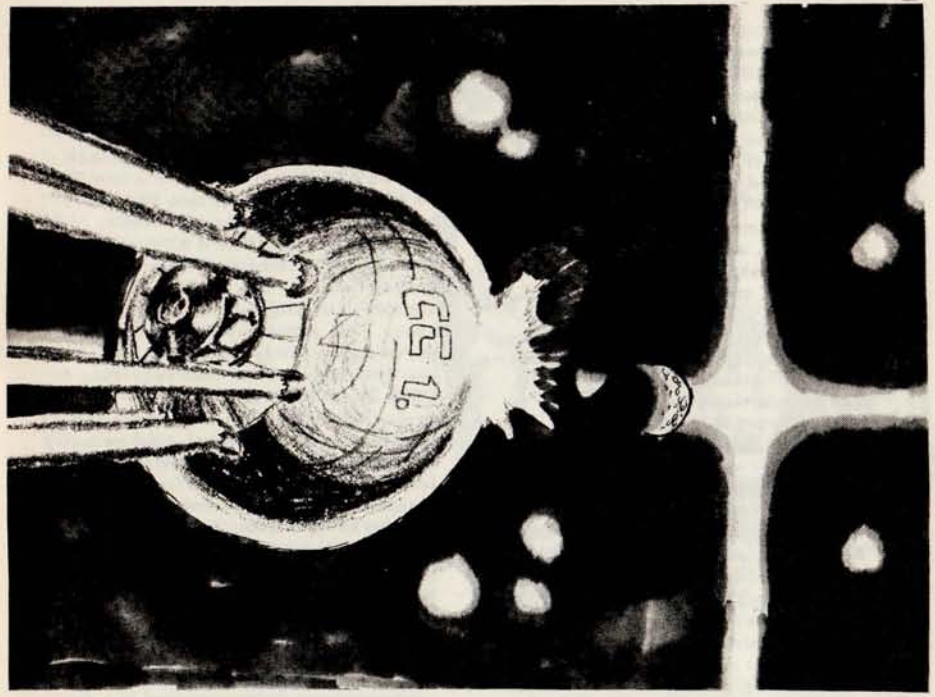
A. Game Reviews, be brief, describe play, components, weaknesses, strong points, and your personal evaluation. Give price and order info too.

B. Fictionalized accounts of actual game play. Many ask for this and some experimentation will be needed to develop a format. Try 2-3,000 words for a star start.

C. Narrative game accounts. Again, not an easy task to condense, say, a 4 player 6 hour Stellar Conquest game into 2,000 words. This is an especially important item for gamers.

D. Game variants and scenarios. There are some really clever variations on basic games devised by gamers. If you have a good one why not write it up and share your fun.

E. Anything else related to sf&f games. As long as it's related and of possible interest to our readers we'll consider it. Issues, gripes, facts, etc. are all things you may see or know that others will appreciate.



A lone Colony Transport on secondary fusion drive heads for a minimally terran world. The purpose is to extend the range of the players ships. The CT will be totally dismantled to become part of the colony's industry.

Winchell Chung Jr.

(Mr. Mitchell agrees with Ed but figures his probabilities differently. And, gets about the same conclusions.)

ATK VS. 3 ESC: A CURSORY DISCOURSE ON PROBABILITY

Edward Cooper's article on the inobvious virtues of the lowly Escort in playing STELLAR CONQUEST ("The Escort Illusion," TSG #3) struck me as a well-conceived and carefully prepared treatise, dealing with the Escort's place in the overall "economy" of a player as well as in combat. Unfortunately, this latter examination was marred by two lapses on his part: firstly, his errors in computing the probabilities involved in a battle between an Attack ship (ATK) and three Escorts (ESC); and secondly, his failure to fully appreciate the factor of numerical advantage. In a few paragraphs, I hope to correct these ommissions.

The basic probabilities, as Mr. Cooper gives them, are correct: in any single Fire Turn (FT), an ATK has a 1/3 (=0.333) chance of knocking out an ESC, while the ESC has a 1/12 (=0.083) chance of scragging an ATK (I will give probabilities in both fractional and decimal forms, as it is easier to understand the derivation of the former, while the latter is better for comparisons). (We changed Mr. Cooper's data to fractions. Ed.) His mistake was the assumption that a roll of the dice eliminated the resultant number from consideration in subsequent rolls, while in actuality they are independent; thus, while a roll of a 6 on one die is 1/6 (=0.167), the roll of two successive 6's (or one 12) is $(1/6)^2 = 1/36$ (=0.028). He also erred in thinking that the probability of 3 ESC's destroying one ATK was simply thrice the probability of a single ESC, which it isn't.

So let us consider Mr. Cooper's battle between an ATK (cost: 20IU pts.) and three ESC's (total cost: 24IU pts.) It is assumed that neither side has Improved Ship Weapons (ISW) and may fire only one barrage at one target per Fire Turn (FT). In the initial Fire Turn (repeat, the initial FT, I'll get back to this), the ATK has 0.333 chance of scragging one of the ESCs. On the other hand, each ESC has a 0.083 chance of taking out the ATK, or an 11/12=0.917 chance of not taking out an ATK. As I learned at Georgia Tech, the probability of event A not occuring, the probability of 3 ESCs not destroying one ATK is therefore $(11/12)^3$=0.770. The chance that a hit will be made is $1-(11/12)^3$=0.230.

At first glance, it would seem that Mr. Cooper was talking through his hat. That's a significant deviation from the 0.295 chance he cited. It's little more than two-thirds the probability of an ATK hitting an ESC, less than three times the chance a lone ESC would have! But all is not lost, for remember, this was only the first FT....

Under optimum conditions, knocking off the ESCs one-two-three, it will still take the ATK three FTs to eliminate those 3 ESCs if they don't withdraw. The probability of this perfect score is $(1/3)^3$=0.037. But even if the ATK lucks out, the ESCs still get six shots at him, three the first FT, two the second, and one the third. In this case, the probability of the ESCs taking out the ATK is $1-(11/12)^6$=0.407! This is almost five times the chance a lone ESC would have to knock out an ATK in a single FT, it may only have one Fire Turn, a good eleven times the probability that the ATK will scrag all 3 ESCs in 3 FTs!

Let's look at the other extreme, the 3 ESCs surviving the first three FTs intact (probability $=(2/3)^3$=0.296). Then they have nine shots at the ATK, a $1-(11/12)^9$=0.543 chance of scoring a hit! Rather than coming off as a fool, Mr. Cooper has been vindicated with a vengeance. The advantages he intuitively sensed proving the potency of the ESC Squadron in combat against the lone Attack vessel.

Having demonstrated the basic value of the strategy let's glance at the tactical side. Given that an ATK costs the same as 2.5 ESCs the exchange of one ATK for a full ESC SQD is favorable for the former player, not the latter. I suspect, then, that most players will tend to withdraw the survivor following a two-thirds decimation of the ESC SQD. The probability of this decimation occuring in the first two FTs is $(1/3)^2$= 0.111. The ESCs have a $1-(11/12)^5$=0.363 chance of tagging the ATK, a bit more than an ATK has of taking out a lone ESC. On the other hand, that lone ESC won't be much of a strike force by itself.

I suggest, then, that if ATK vs. ESC SQD battles become very common in Stellar Conquest there will emerge two schools of strategy amongst the Escort users. One will advocate withdrawal of surviving forces following the loss of one ESC. (I leave the odds regarding 2 ESCs vs. an ATK as the proverbial exercise for the reader). The other will prefer to fight on until a second casualty is incurred. Naturally, if withdrawal leaves one of your prize colonies with no defenses before the enemy, you'd be well advised to fight to the last man. There will always be those who operate on the principle of 'death before dishonor', but in general I think those would be the likely choices.

As for the ATK user, the variables which would affect his tactics are a bit too complex to go into here. On the one hand, in any given Fire Turn he always has the superior firepower, a 0.333 chance of scoring a hit as opposed to the ESC SQD's maximum probability of .23. But on the other hand the ATK fights an all-or-nothing battle. He can't survive any hit from the 3 ESCs which can fight for at least three FTs. At a guess, I would say that the ATK was well advised to withdraw if he scored no hit after two FTs. Or, if after scoring one hit another two or three FTs pass without a second enemy scragged he should withdraw. But those are only off-the-cuff opinions. Each player will have to gague his chances himself and trust to the throw of the dice.

Of course, you could always have your Attack ships escorted by a Dreadnaught.

C. G. Mitchell III
Stone Mountain, Georgia

I HAVE SEEN THE FUTURE AND IT DOESN'T PLAY WELL (A REVIEW OF 4,000A.D.)

I was very impressed when I first opened the box cover on my new 4,000A.D. space-war game from House of Games. In fact, I was close to amazed at the evident quality of the physical components. Unfortunately, my mood of happy contentment was foredoomed to collide with the realities of poor design.

As I have admitted, the game's components are visually superb. Yet, something bad is happening here. Some one, somewhere, went to a powerful lot of artistic trouble to design and produce 4,000 A.D.'s physical parts. I only wish they had paid half as much attention to the game's more ephemeral guts--the rationale behind it, the science, and the rules of play.

At this point, you may be wondering: If the game is so bad, at least in this reviewer's own opinion, why bother reading the review? Glad you asked me. It is here my contention to show that--just as studying the Arab handling of the 1948 war can show you how not to general troops; how reading Von Daniken's books can show you how not to conduct scientific research; how examining Jack the Ripper's exploits can show you how not to treat the opposite sex--just so may a careful perusal of 4,000 A.D. show you how not to design a science-fictional war game!

4,000 A.D.'s game map is beautiful to the eye while, at the same time, slightly offensive to an astronomically bent mind. There are forty-eight stars shown on the map, and I didn't even have to count them one-by-one to know this immediately. For the stars are equally spaced and divided up among the board's twelve rectangular divisions

This is no great failing. I was able to accept it right off with only a faint, inward shuddering when I saw that many stars that lie even in opposite directions from central co-ordinate based Earth were placed right next to each other. Still, I couldn't help but recall the astronomically perfect representation of the near galaxy which is the map of STARFORCE or the well represented star cluster of STELLAR CONQUEST. The people who designed those two maps have my respect and admiration.

Some of Neil's friends express agreement with his views.

The designer of 4,000 A.D.'s map did nothing more or less than draw twenty-four big yellow circles and twenty-four small red ones. Then, with no regard to the Norton's Star Atlas, the names of varied stars were strewn over the circles.

Why big yellow circles and small red ones? Well, 4,000 A.D. uses a kiddy-system of three-dimensional movement. The map is to be visualized in two layers. The yellow stars are the top layer and (red-shift, I suppose) the red ones are the bottom layer. To go from red to red within the same rectangle of four stars is a 'distance' of one. From red to yellow, in the same rectangle is two. Everytime you enter an adjacent rectangle of stars adds another distance of one.

To add three-dimensionality such as this is meaningless. The designer has arbitrarily, and wrongly, placed all the stars in two different planes only. Compare this with the direct representation of the star field in STARFORCE, or the abstract representations of the same problem in STELLAR CONQUEST or TRIPLANETARY.

STARFORCE uses three-dimensionality in such a manner that the flat playing area must be visualized as a sphere. Within that sphere, all the stars lie in their astronomically correct relationships. STELLAR CONQUEST has all of its stars in the same flat plane, but their distances from each other are such that relative travel times between each star are pretty close to correct. TRIPLANETARY, working with just one solar system, has no need to worry about different planes but instead has come up with a novel vector-movement system which simulates the effects of gravity-wells.

The point is that a good science-fiction game will only try for complexity in order to simulate reality. If he must, the game's designer will go for a very complex system indeed. However, to add just a touch of confusion for no reason other than to 'jazz' up the game can only result in poor design and a loss in playability.

After I saw the map, my beady eyes lit upon the starship counters or, rather, units. The game uses actual plastic playing pieces molded to look like little, abstract, Destination Moon spaceships. Much nicer than cardboard counters, even die-cut counters.

The problem is in what the rules expect you to do with these expensive appearing components.

Now, as a Science Fiction reader I have believed many things in my day. Damon Knight refers to this as 'willing suspension of disbelief.' As a Science Fiction writer I have also tried to create many believable, totally impossible things. This, by the way, is called 'trying to make a buck.' However, when it comes to trying to believe in the rationale behind 4,000 A.D.'s movement system all I can willingly suspend is my interest.

The ships, you see, move by Space Warp. Every game turn your starships advance a little further on their warping journey. After two turns you have accumulated two warps worth of potential distance for each ship that has been in the warp since the game's beginning. After three turns, you have a potential of three in your warp, and so on.

These potentials for movement are not used in the way you might expect. According to the game's rules booklet (and my own parenthesized glosses):

> "(Ships travel) for a short distance in normal space in a certain direction. But when they break through into hyper-space, they do not continue in this specific direction. "Their direction of travel from that point can be likened to the movement of an expanding sphere, as when air is blown into a balloon; outward in all directions from the starting point....(The ships) are potentially at any one of these positions (at any point on the surface of the expanding balloon.)"

This means that if a ship has been waiting in warp for five turns, it has the potential to move in any direction five units away from its starting point. As a game system, this promotes and rewards poor strategical planning. For if five turns ago, it was the Player's strategy to go to star A he may now, instead, go to star A, B, or C or any other star five units from his original starting point.

Also, this seems to me to be extremely ill-thought out scientifically. While I can comprehend the idea of a 'warp' being potentially anywhere on an expanding sphere, I would much prefer to think that the destination of such a ship could not be variable. Picture being on such a ship. You have been in warp for so many days. You may reappear at any one of a number of stars, all equally distant from your starting point, all in opposite directions.

Not only does this boggle the mind, but it does so in a way which--and this is what is important--not only does not increase the game's appeal but actually detracts from it.

Here we have a physical concept which flies in the face of all know theories. Great, I'm for that in a short story if it is presented in a proper pseudoscientific background of plausibility. Even some game simulations can get away with it. Witness how STARFORCE is based, movement-system wise, on mental teleportation.

In STARFORCE this rather implausible system of movement allows the game to bypass Einsteinian Space and Time limitations while contributing to the game's playability. Also, Redmond Simonsen spent a lot of time making sure that his pseudo-science was self-consistent and presented in an entertaining way so that the reader, in order to be entertained, would suspend his disbelief.

4,000 A.D., on the other hand, asks you to believe not a good, short-story type background of scenarios but rather a lot of doubletalk in the back of the rules booklet. Furthermore, the system you are asked to believe in when you play 4,000 A.D. detracts from the game's worth in that it introduces an element of chance and luck appropriate more to MONOPOLY than to a war game.

Next time you set yourself down to design a SF wargame, keep in mind the fact that you are not only doing a game--you are designing a universe. That universe must not only be self-consistent and an interesting concept unto itself, it has got to make a contribution to the game design as a game.

In truth, war games are the hardest of all games to design. Of war games, designing a good science fiction one can be the most challenging of assignments.

The rest of 4,000 A.D.'s rules are also riddled with such faults as already discussed. For instance, it has the worst combat system of any war game I have ever seen from any publisher.

The operative rule reads: "To defeat an enemy fleet...a player must attack with at least one more ship than the defending force."

This isn't poor science fiction alone, it is also poor wargaming. In 4,000 A.D. a fleet of twenty-six ships will always, always, always defeat a fleet of twenty-five--and defeat it totally with complete elimination of the opposing force with no loss to friendly vessels.

There is more doubletalk in the rules about this, but I don't believe it. Perhaps a Player could design his own Combat Rules Tables. I even thought of including a substitute CRT in this article, but I've decided not. There is more wrong here than just how combat is decided, much more.

Science Fiction wargaming is a new field, and one which holds out a bright promise of fun and creativity in the coming years. Now, while the field is still germinal, we must look over what has been accomplished. We must see where things have gone wrong and examine them so as to promote better SF gaming tomorrow.

Hopefully, all of the upcoming games will be well-done and interestingly presented. I know that I, for one, will always be ready to suspend my own disbelief over a well-designed and playable game.

Neil Shapiro
Jackson Hts., NY

The staff of TSG apologizes, even though you wouldn't have noticed. This was to our first issue with a 'mini' game. Yes, a lot of gaming zines envy Strategy & Tactics and we wanted big time too with a game in every issue.

Genius free-lance designer Red 'John Galt' Darnigame did deliver his suprise game on time. He hadn't told us what it was to be. Red promised a real smash. It was to be one of those individual role-playing and achievement games like DRUG'EM & DRAG'EM or SCORCHER. Just imagine our horror when he unveiled, with usual boyish glee, his new effort HOOKER, person-to-person street level tactics game. Really! He may publish everything he dreams up but TSG does have good taste, for bookworms and termites anyhow. And, that absolutely LURID cover! Red must keep a deprived artistic troll chained under his door-step fully supplied with Penthouses and similar ilk. (Uh, what do you mean fairy sister, Red.)

We tried to cut him off as he waxed loquacious about how HOOKER was only the first of a theme series from the basic, and we mean basic, game system If HOOKER was out we aren't about to touch PORNO LORDS, entertainment industry legal level, STRIPPER, tactical cleavage level, VIRGIN, him-tactile ambush level/her-strategic betrothal level or ORGIES, multi-player melee level rules. Needles to say we threw him out, our grand dreams dashed, nay tarnished.

Next issue we'll make it, no pun intended, for sure. Red outlined by phone, which is as close as he's getting for awhile, a unique new game of warships in the age of sail and cannon. It meets every acid test we can think of. So, be patient, next issue brings you Darnigames SCURVEY. Admittedly it'll be the fruitiest game ever published. But, the human interest of men against the C will really grab you.

WHAT'S IN A GAME?

In TSG #2, K. Allen Bjorke raised the question, "What makes an SF game an SF game?" He mentioned the old problem of Space Opera mentality. (For "battleship" read "spaceship"; for "Japanese Infantry" read "Vegan Robotoids", and so on). On the other hand, he suggests unique rule systems as a definitive criterion. This is my perception of the SF game problem.

Firstly, what is a game? For the purpose at hand, I'm not going to restrict myself to games played on a grid with die-cut counters, or to any such limited view. A game is any pastime for one or more entities (including computers), which involves the achievement of an objective. This leaves the field wide open; we can talk about sports games, trade and business games, political, historical, or (aha!) war games.

Once we get down to realistic simulations (and there are some outside the war game field), we can ask ourselves what makes game A different from game B, within the same general class of game. Most war games are similar to one another. To outsiders they are identical to several decimal places. The real difference comes in the general behavior of units, and other factors which are apparent only on playing the game. An objective measure of the difference between two good games is that they each recreate their historical conditions with some accuracy. For certain tactical games, the "feel" of the historical and physical setting is important. This presents problems for SF games.

It is very difficult to create a realistic sf game situation. The only historical situations we have available are novels and stories, and the writers had to make up the data for these. (Some people say they're just reporting facts, but I won't quibble.) Because we don't have data, we have to imagine what the situation we're interested in might be like. The first temptation is to design a game based on what we know and understand. This leads to the familiar syndrome whereby the SF game is just a normal war game in BEM's clothing. The second temptation is to use radical rule systems to create effects from SF.

Mr. Bjorke cites the use of moving planets in orbit as one example of rules which make SF games unique. I disagree with that particular example, because it directly conflicts with the technology of the period. In the far future, when space wars are feasible, computer technology will be of high order. To a spaceship captain, navigation will be little more difficult than present-day ship navigation. But here we are at our war-game table madly calculating orbits so our ship will reach Mars orbit at the same point that Mars does. Of course, fuel considerations and communication difficulties may have a real, game level effect, but this kind of thing could be handled in a more elegant fashion than by moving the planet about. Rule sets such as this may add to apparent realism but often destroy playability.

From my own experience, the only way to design a proper SF game is to create a universe, and then decide what events might occur. Games based in the universe would involve only the factors relevant to the problem at hand. The remaining factors would be abstracted or ignored, to preserve playability. Three examples of the abstraction/realism balance in SF games are STARFORCE, STELLAR CONQUEST, and TRIPLANETARY. I choose these games because they're the only ones I own in the SF field.

STARFORCE is a war game on an interstellar scale. The map is an accurate representation of the stars within 20 light-years of Earth. Star locations have their third dimension printed on the map alongside the star hexes. Both movement and combat involve the psychic powers of the spaceship and stargate crews. These are the realistic aspects of the game.

Abstractions are involved at two levels. The "basic game" uses a simple form of simultaneous combat. The "advanced game" uses a complex tactical combat system, somewhat analogous to tactical battles fought in Miniatures wargame campaigns. Combat results involve the stunning of crews and disabling of Stargates. In the basic game, total destruction of the above is used. Hidden movement is simple: you know the hex locations of spaceships, but you don't know the 3-D location or the number of ships in each hex. (Try simulating realistic hidden movement on this level!)

STELLAR CONQUEST uses a different kind of abstraction. Because nothing happens in interstellar space, the 3rd dimension is irrelevant to play. Because the game deals with the colonization of planets habitability of worlds is important, and the game rules deal extensively with this aspect. Production and technological advancement are delineated in a brief but believable fashion. Although combat itself is important (and sometimes overwhelms other factors), the rules covering them are very short. A thorough and detailed set of combat rules would probably bog the game in endless conflict.

TRIPLANETARY (GDW) is a game of interplanetary travel. The map involves the major bodies out to Jupiter, including 3 of the Jovian moons and the Asteroid Belt. The planets don't move around, and all play in 2-dimensional (a minor abstraction, due to the Ecliptic). Movement involves momentum, and the expenditure of fuel points to change direction, accelerate, or decelerate. A simple set of vector movement rules depict the effects of gravity in a very elegant fashion. Combat uses guns (both distance and velocity difference affect the result), torpedoes, and mines, not to to mention the Nukes. Ramming also occurs. These are the very items Mr. Bjorke lists as being uninspiring in other games. The fact that they are treated in context with the other, realistic rules makes them acceptable here, because they are derived from the space-opera type situations this game depicts.

To summarize: An SF game is a game which deals with an SF subject in a believable fashion. It may use mechanics taken from other game types, or it may involve a completely novel system. The factor which makes the greatest difference is credibility. If a game is capable of making the players suspend their disbelief in the events they are simulating, they're playing a good SF game.

Norman S. Howe
Winnipeg, Canada

Due to lack of space this issue the Game Ratings were left out. We're in the process of revamping them to be a more meaningful guide. The final old style ratings will appear next issue.

Also, don't forget to nominate your choice for the 'Worst SF&F Game'. All games published through the end of 1975 will be eligible for this first award. It'll be annual thereafter.

GAME REVIEW: TUNNELS AND TROLLS

The T&T game is fun and easy to learn to play. It is my understanding that most of the elements found in DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS are present in T&T. The rules are concise and easy to understand, yet flexible in application. There are some areas of the rules that are left a little vague, but there appears to be no serious oversights. The rules were intentionally left open-ended to encourage innovation on the part of the players, and with some imagination it is easy to fill in whatever gaps the rules leave.

There are two basic levels of play, a simple version for beginners, and a set of elaborations that add a lot of detail to the game. I personally prefer the more elaborate set of rules as I find that the extra detail enhances my enjoyment of play.

You as a tunnel traveler can be a warrior, wizard, or rogue. Your ability to cope with various situations that arise in the tunnels is dependent upon your individual characteristics, experience, and the type of character you are. As you travel through the tunnels, you accumulate both experience and wealth. The experience is necessary to increase your survival ability and the wealth gives experience points as well as providing funds to buy supplies, armour, weapons, etc. Also if you are a wizard or rogue it costs you to learn magic spells (a rogue can use low level magic). In addition to the wealth that can be found in the tunnels, other discoveries can include items like magic swords etc.

Much of the quality of a given game results from the efforts of the tunnel masters involved. Each player serves as master of a given tunnel and is responsible for stocking the tunnel with an assortment of monsters, goodies, traps, etc. In addition to stocking the tunnel, he also designs the layout of the tunnel. A tunnel master's characters cannot travel in his tunnel.

All in all, T&T is an excellent game. The rules are well conceived, the printing clear, and the illustrations are good. In addition, the low price tag of the game makes it a good buy.

Larry Pound
Chadron, Nebraska

THE PFS RIP-OFF VS. SUPER MB

You might ask first off after reading my title, "What is a PFS Rip-Off?" and "What is a Super MB?" Well, to explain what a PFS rip-off is and how it occurs is an essentially easy task. There have been voiced several comments on how, in long-playing games, each player is able to put Force Screens around everyone of his planets. This puts the planet in a state of total inconquerability and most of STELLAR CONQUEST is concerned with colonizing and capturing planets, it takes away nearly all the fun. Several ideas have been put together on how to avoid this total destruction of the game's basic concept. A few deal with producing a new type of planet-based technology called Level 4, which is not covered in the rules booklet. Some people have as their Level 4 technology all kinds of unusual systems for eliminating the problem of PFS. One contemplates the production of "PFS overload capability" for a fleet of 20 DN. This fleet is supposed to be designed just for the fun of blowing up PFS planets and being blown up with them! It packs a hefty price, 600 IU. While this system is not a bad one, I think there is one which is less complicated and much superior.

First, there is no reason to put PFS around every planet in your star realm. You and your fellow player(s) can get together and change the rules a bit. Agree between each other that it will be illegal in the duration of the game to place PFS around more than one planet at a time in the entire length of the game. This effectively eliminates the possible complete PFSing over the game map and will lead to a more enjoyable simulation game. In truth, there is the possibility that one Prime Base will have so many defenses as to be impenetrable, but as for all the planets....no way!

You are thinking now about possible planets deep inside the enemy territory which are colonized by your forces. How can these planets be defended when my main bases for DN production are so far away that the enemy forces can sneak up on me before I have a chance to bring reinforcements in time when his production year comes? The answer is simple. You will have the right to move your PFS enveloped planet's PFS to the new base inside enemy territory. In effect, when you feel your innermost bases are defended properly by other forces, you can destroy Prime Base's PFS and now have the right to move it to another planet. Agreed you will have to pay for it all over again, but you would have to anyway if you could build unlimited PFS.

Now it is time to get into the need for Super-MB. When I first read the SC rulebook, I was totally caught off-guard when it stated that the most advanced missile base that could be constructed was the AMB, the equivalent of an ATK. Then I found out about PFS and I realized why this was so. DN's are totally defenseless against PFS, and only a planet could build them.

Now that we are eliminating most of the PFS's on the game map, there must be some sort of DN protection for a planet. The answer is what I term a "Super MB." This is a grounded DN which can never leave the planet on which it is built. It would have the same effect against a DN as a DN would have against a DN. The cost schedule would be as follows:

Pred Event		With Pred	W/O Pred
AIT	SMB Research Cost	70IU	85IU
---	SMB UNIT COST	30IU	----

Thus, because it lacks the ability to move, it would be cheaper to construct than a DN (40 IU). I hope that some of you gamers out there will take my suggestion to heart and use it. I think it is the best method available.

Avery Goodman
Dix Hills, New York

SF&F GAMING NEWS/PLUGS

Texas A&M Wargame Con

The Texas A&M Wargames Society is planning to hold a convention, WarCon II, in the Rudder Tower on the A&M campus April 9-11. Featured will be a Panzerleader tournament, naval miniatures, DIPLOMACY, DUNGEONS & DRAGONS, and perhaps EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE. There are not many cons in Texas, so here's your chance. Time permitting, someone from TSG may attend on the weekend. Details are available from Keith Gross; Box 8199; College Station, TX 77844.

The Crystiellion (formerly Palantir)

"This is a fantasy magazine dedicated to both fantasy reading and gaming." That sums up the varied and lively content of 24 pages. Consists of fantasy game accounts, D&D and miniatures mostly, fantasy fiction, magazine reviews (thanks for the nice TSG plug), game reviews, a D&D PBM moderators column, plus other items that will interest those getting into fantasy gaming. Edited by Jeff Martin; 242 Meadow Ln.; Plainfield, IN 46168. Six issues for $1.50. Admittedly irregular, but 4-6 issues per year.

"Supernova" in Booklet

"Supernova," formerly published by Lew Pulsipher, is now in booklet form. The fall issue had a stiff cover and offset printing in an 8 1/2" by 11" format. "Supernova" is now published "irregularly" by The Flying Buffalo Inc.; Box 1467; Scottsdale, AZ 85252. Rick Loomis, who also publishes "The Flying Buffalo's Favorite Magazine," is editor. This issue carried some design notes on STELLAR CONQUEST and a lengthy S&S-type fiction piece.

MICHICON V

The Metro Detroit Gamers will hold their eighth adult gaming convention, June 11-13, 1976, in the Univ. of Detroit Student Activities Building, McNichols Campus. All types of wargaming will be present, including DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS and EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE. This is one of the better-regarded conventions by an experienced group. For information contact: Bill Somers; 1654 Chandler; Lincoln, Park, MI 48146; 1-313-381-7152.

Scientologists: New for D&D (!)

D&D enthusiasts shouldn't miss out on the November, 1975, issue of "The American Wargamer." Available for 35¢ from Rod Burr; 13 Grove St. #8; Boston, MA 02114. Anyhow, if your sense of humor will take it, Glen Blacow has created a new D&D monster, Scientologist, possessed of an aura charm that can induce one to take a pamphlet. The action can develop so far as to have Ron Hubbard appear in a blaze for a manditory "audit" of the group. No doubt Glen has started a whole new genre of monsters--Rednecks, Libbers, SDS SDS'ers, etc. etc. can't be far behind. (Alright--anyone who feels gored, go ahead and write, but laughing is healthy. Ouch! Not the stones, guys!.)

STARGUARD Up-date

In THE SPACE GAMER #2 rules for a tactical infantry game, STARGUARD, from McEwan Miniatures, was mentioned in this column. Subsequent to that plug, a reader brought to our attention a problem he'd had ordering the rules. We contacted McEwan and received a prompt response, consisting of a revised edition to the STARGUARD rules, a catalog, and a copy of a letter sent by McEwan to all STARGUARD buyers. An excerpt from the text of that letter is reprinted here for your information:

"We're sorry about the delay in sending your Starguard Rules, but we hope that you will feel it worth the wait when you see them. After the first edition was sold out we felt that the rules needed some changes to clear up some unclear parts. We began the changes with the idea it would take only a few weeks. Fourteen new pages, and three new races of people later we found that revision was not as easy as it looked on first glance.

...we have added several new pages of background, uniform, weapons, and organizational tables.

The new Starguard is thirty pages for $3.50." Signed, John McEwan.

We have received no further complaints from readers. Since we noted other game outlets sold STARGUARD, we inquired about wholesale rates, but have received no response in two months. Revised rules for STARGUARD are available from McEwan Miniatures; 380 D. Street; Salt Lake City, UT 84103 for $3.50. They also

have a catalog of figurines suitable for use in playing the game.

DIPLOMACY SF&F Variants

Lewis Pulsipher, former editor/ publisher of "Supernova," is offering a packet of science fiction and fantasy variants for the game DIPLOMACY. The packet contains twelve variants, many published in "Supernova," in twenty 8 1/2 by 11" and seven 8 1/2 by 14" off-set sheets. Most of the variants are accompanied by maps. The packet is available from Lewis Pulsipher; Box 1021, Grad Center; Duke University; Durham, NC for $2 plus 25¢ postage.

PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON

Glen Taylor; 6908 Buchanan St.; Landover Hills, MD 20784 offers play-by mail moderating for a complex tactical space-war game PRELUDE TO ARMAGEDDON. Glen reports a lot of response to the plug in TSG #2. Rules are 35¢; game fee is 20¢ per turn.

"The Strategic Review"

"The Strategic Review" is now bi-monthly. The official publication of TSR Hobbies Inc.; Box 756; Lake Geneva, WI 53147, $3 for six issues. With the first issue edited by Tim Kask, TSR has shown steady improvement and expansion. The 8 1/2 by 11" sixteen-page booklet format is typeset and contains much material on TSR games, mostly fantasy and miniatures. If you dig TSR fantasy games, you won't regret the $3. (Now come on, it isn't so hard to compliment a competitor is it? .....is it? ? ! !)

WANTADS

Will umpire STARLORD. 20 turns all postage paid. Entry fee six dollars. Send SSAE to R. Pouliot; 7304 Carol Ln; Falls Church, VA 22042.

For Sale: The infamous Star Trek Battle Manual by Lou Zocchi (comparable to ALIEN SPACE) outlawed by Paramount. These are collector's items of which I have a few mint copies available. Will sell to highest bidders. Randy Heller; 246 Iris Ave. #14; Stockton, CA 95207.

Advanced SC methods. Advanced ships, weapons, defenses, industrial capacity. SC materials required. $2.00 for postage and handling to: LDS; Box 485; Glenview, Illinois 66025.

STELLAR CONQUEST Tournament and Match Game Rating Service. For information, send $1 and SSAE to Layout Design Specialists; P.O. Box 485; Glenview, Illinois 66025.

I would like to contact anyone interested in playing STELLAR CONQUEST in the Ann Arbor, MI area. Jim DeCook, 2877 Bellwood; Ann Arbor, MI 48104.

Wanted: Spacegamers, wargamers, DIPLOMACY players in Ventura County get in touch. Mark Armstrong; 931 Camellia St.; Oxnard, CA 93030; (805)485-7703.

Subscribers may place ads at the rate of 50¢ for 25 words.

SF gaming news/plugs will mention products, activities, and services that may be of interest to readers.

James Oliveto

LETTERS

I purchased a subscription to THE SPACE GAMER because TSG #2 intrigued me. It was sort of a novelty. However, had I seen TSG #3 first, I would have subscribed because I was impressed. TSG #3 was quite good to say the least. If the quality of the contributions to TSG are equal to those in issue #3, you've got yourself a winner.

Ed Cooper's "The Escort Illusion," Neil Shapiro's "Two Views of the Future," and Scott Rusch's "What's Wrong With an H-Bomb?" are by far the best articles on SF gaming I have read so far. Keep up the good work.

Also, I'd like to put in a few suggestions about SF games. John Oxley's letter prompted me to think of some SF literature that would lend itself to SF gaming. In addition to the fine examples he chose, I would include Heinlein's The Moon is a Harsh Mistress, and Orphans in the Sky, Niven's "Known Space" stories, and Niven's and Pournelle's The Mote in God's Eye. Combat SF edited by Gordon Dickson also contains some good stories to adapt to a game format.

Besides looking into science fiction literature for game ideas, how about offering gamers a chance to design their own games? Metagaming does this to a limited degree by its game contest, and I am all in favor of it. To make this task easier for the gamer-designer, you could produce playing maps that are just hex grids on white chart paper. Details would be filled in and other components supplied by the gamer-designer.

Also, why don't you offer boxes for your games STELLAR CONQUEST or THE YTHRI? The plastic bags are not good protection. Personally I don't like my games torn-up so I transferred my copy of SC to an old SPI box. Suggestion: acquire a number of SPI boxes (minus the game of course) and sell them separately as an additional product. This would provide adequate protection for such a great game as SC or TY. You've got a great magazine and great games, so keep up the good work in 1976.

James E. Tucker
El Paso, TX

****

I recently received two fantasy games perhaps worthy of note: TWO TOWERS which recreates Middle Earth; and THE QUEST OF THE MAGIC RING, which does the same while ripping you off.

TWO TOWERS is available through Lou Zocchi, and others for eight bucks, for which you get a black and beige paper game board (a hex-map of Middle Earth which is neither aesthetic nor accurate), a set of die-cut counters with words and no graphics, and an incredibly lightweight set of rules (less than two 8 1/2 by 11 pages). For this you pay? It smacks of great hurry in preparation (for Christmas perhaps?), using virtually no interesting new concepts or approaches, and only mundane efforts to simulate necessary effects. Magic (which has been over complicated in several amateur games, I admit) here only causes the CRT column to shift, irrespective of whether that is sensible in the various situations that Tolkien used it. It is however a board-game in the basic sense, and I have not yet had time to play it enough to see whether this excruciating simple-mindedness is worthwhile. The author (Fantasy Game Company) could have at least had the grace to excuse the rule's inadequacy by suggesting that the buyer "invent some of your own."

THE QUEST OF THE MAGIC RING makes TWO TOWERS look like a best buy. The box suggests that it is playable by 10 year olds and they mean it: the game is a physically beautiful, high-quality game of CHUTES AND LADDERS. It is literally a parcheesi-type of "get from A to B without being caught" scenario, following little squares of pathways from "The Shire" to the "Crack of Fire." It is full of curious verbal dodges (apparently to avoid problems with the copyrights on the Middle Earth names), such as "City of the Mark" for Eddoras, and "Elf Woods" for Lorien. The playing surface is a plasticized sheet in full color which is virtually an identical copy of the rough map suggested by this same company in its miniatures rules, "The Ringbearer." In fact, many of the movement and play suggestions (and the "rules" such as they are) must be from the same source too. The problem is that "The Ringbearer" costs and its worth just three dollars, not twelve. Besides the families who play the game, and the countless number of Tolkien fans who get burned (since the box is sealed in plastic), I can't honestly see how anyone old enough to understand the Lord of

the Rings can either feel excited by the prospect of playing the QUEST or not feel ripped off by the price.

It prompts one to wonder whether the fantasy market is going to be exploited by rush-jobs of potentially decent games (like TWO TOWERS) which suffer for insufficient development time (and expense) and bargain-quality graphics; or by carefully done production jobs on thoroughly inferior or ill-suited content (such as QUEST). The comparison of SPI's new SORCEROR shows how much you can do with (a) some sense of design and production; (b) a set of new ideas about the fantasy subject; (c) a decent amount of detail and variety to meet the interests of the adult gamer; and (d) a basis commitment to quality in the core subject (rules and scenarios). I'll save reactions to SORCEROR for another time.

For the record: TWO TOWERS, eight bucks; Fantasy Games, no address given. QUEST OF THE MAGIC RING, twelve bucks; Land of Legend, The Soldiery, 11401 Grandview, Wheaton MD 20902.

Mark Leymaster
Boston, MA

****

Just a quick note about Edward Cooper's article, "The Escort Illusion." What is this "the same number rolled with two dice is never rolled twice"???? His entire statistics-percentages section is based on the wrong idea that one die roll affects the next one. That works in a chit system, where a chit is no longer available after you pull it out. But there is no reason in the world why you can't roll the same number on two dice over and over again. So what if you roll a 6 on your first attack roll? That has nothing whatever to do with the second attack roll, or the third attack roll. As a matter of fact, when you attack with a bunch of ships you worsen your odds. If I remember correctly, you have to say which ship you are shooting at with each of your ships. If your first shot destroys the enemy ship, then your subsequent shots at the same enemy ship are wasted.

I agree that escort ships are valuable. If you build attack ships too early, and the enemy gets in a couple of lucky hits, a major portion of your fleet is destroyed (In my first game, my first ATK ship, the pride of my fleet, was destroyed by two missile bases!)

Rick Loomis
Scottsdale, AZ

****

The problem with a three player game of SC is that the board has four corners. The obvious solution is to remove the corners and turn the board into a hexagon. The largest hexagon that can be drawn on the SC map is 15 hexes on a side and its corners are: 5 hexes N of Arcturus, 1 hex S of Polaris, 5 hexes S of Kruger, 7 hexes S of Pherda, 1 hex NE of Sirius, 4 hexes NW of Cephei (N being the label edge of the map). The unused corners can be blanked out by taping paper over them. Mira and Canis are out of play, unless play on half hexes is agreed to. This cuts the board down by about a third while preserving its original symmetry. There are two sets of possible starting points. Nobody is stuck behind a dust cloud, and everyone has a clear shot at a G class star by the first production year. I think this is the best and fairest way to set up a three player game.

John Prenis
Philadelphia, PA

****

I'm afraid SC's rule 7.2.2 is a bit hard to follow as written. I interpret it to give a conqueror the option to cripple the industry of a subject colony by reducing the number of IU's to the bare minimum of one per million population, a sort of "scorched earth" in reverse.

Likewise, while rule 7.2.7 allows a conqueror to deport the populace of a conquered colony, at his expense, it says nothing about where he may send them; I presume the destination should be a colony of the player who originally colonized the planet, and suggest that the original colonizer be required to choose that destination. I also infer, from the last sentence, that a conqueror cannot settle his own population upon a conquered colony so long as the original populace is still present, although this is not explicitly stated.

Finally, I'd like to suggest a few restrictions for the industrial development of conquered colonies, to complement the prohibition against missile bases and Planetary Force Screens. Basically, they boil down to a proscription against elevating a conquered colony to a higher technological level, or appropriating a higher technology from a subject world, but a few examples may make them clearer:

A player without RIU technology who conquers a world with RIUs may use them, but may not construct any more, on any world under his control, before paying the proper research costs.

A player with RIU technology who conquers a colony that has no RIUs may not construct any Robotic Industrial Units upon that world, even if the original colonizer already has them on other colonies of his.

The same relationships hold for IIT, AIT and Basic levels, and for reconquests and reversions to the original owner.

Of course, if you think it would be better to do it the other way, allowing conquerors to profit from the superior technology of a subject colony, and to elevate inferior technologies, that's your perogative; and, of course, players can decide to use whichever practice they like. But it is a point which should be covered by the rules.

C. G. Mitchell, III
Stone Mountain, GA

****

My wargaming-space gaming opponent and I are in a similar situation. We are both married and it is seldom we can get together for a two or three hour game, so we each buy a copy of a game and play by phone.

Playing by phone, like playing by mail has some disadvantages, but also has some advantages. Many of the games we play will allow us to deviate from the rules with secret deployment, hidden movement, or limited intelligence on the enemy, which are very difficult to handle when only face to face playing is being used. These deviations occasionally lead to problems with rule interpretation and play balance, but they move the game light-years away from chess type games and into nerve-rackingly realistic second guessing of not only where your opponent will move next, but also where he is now and perhaps where he was last turn.

Now for all of us play by phone and play by mail gamers, as well as for those face to face gamers who would occasionally like to game by phone to get the limited intelligence factor in, I would like to make two requests:

If you are designing a game and come across a rule that plays well on remote game boards but not face to face, please put it down; as an optional rule, as one scenario among many, as a footnote, but put it down.

If you have a space game variant that plays sell remote but not well face to face, submit it to TSG. At least give it a try.

Charles R. Bowles
Colorado Springs, CO

****

I and a few of my friends have been gaming now for the past five years. Initially we played many of the Avalon Hill-SPI-type historical simulation games. However, the other night a friend happened to bring a magazine--yours--over to the house. I was immediately struck with the novel idea of a magazine devoted entirely to gaming--specifically in the science fiction/fantasy realm. I wondered at first about the practicality of this type of venture, but after reading your most recent issue I simply had to have your publication!

In the ever-proliferating field of simulation games the specualtive and fantastic has largely been ignored. With the advent of your publication I see a period of unlimited growth in these two areas.

I was extremely impressed with the various types of articles included--most notable was the essay on the importance of the escort in SC. Articles of this nature are informative and interesting reading in themself. Your mag provides a forum for discussion of strategy and tactics beyond the immediate circle of one's friends.

Gary G. Staud
Cincinnati, OH

****

I begin to wonder if the hobby is spreading too fast sometimes. Players begin to whip out turns automatically without stopping to consider the basic situation they are playing in, not to mention the "below the surface" aspects of the games. What you said struck me as very true, players do need time and competition to see just how complex SC really is. I guess this is why I am commenting at length about it.

What I'm afraid of is players will come down with what I like to call

Player Syndrome. Confronted with a multitude of games, most of which are decent, well-handled ones, they tend to look and play all the games as whole instead of pausing and analyzing each game situation individually as they should. For example, a player is involved in 3 SC games at once, under one or more moderators, or even face to face. He begins to play the three as a whole instead of assuming the roles of three, independent player rulers. Instead of "living" the game he is playing and in turn enabling himself to see and realize the basic truths and complexities involved, he plays it as though he were a non-partisan, a by-stander with no real care at stake. This actually changes his whole playing style and eventually, his outlook and desire for the game. Why? Maybe because he begins to take chances that he wouldn't normally take, in other words, if the game were real; thus he causes a loss of flavor.

He doesn't realize this at the time of course, but he does start to wonder why he is losing his yen for playing. The question I ask is, "How do we make him, the common player, aware of this so he can guard against it?" I somehow feel it is your and even my responsibility since we are all a part of the SF world. I haven't found an answer, but I'm still trying.

Edward Cooper
Riverside, CA

****

Your "Where We're Going" in TSG #3 leads me to a couple of comments. As a computer operator I can say that a computer would smooth your operations somewhat but don't get one! A small company starting out can't afford to pour their money down that bottomless pit. If necessary see a service bureau.

As for "invisible business operations" in general it isn't entirely necessary. Making due dates saves customer frustration but A.H. has maintained a man-to-man style that is part of what sells their product. You look great compared to L. Zocchi's jumbled up, "country store," catalog.

The most important thing in your mag and advertisements is the game descriptions. They are all very good. They make it easy to pick and choose but giving me a clear idea of game rules and subject matter. A game advertised, "Great, gorgeous, wonneful, fantastic about-something-or-other, you'll love it," gets a big 'X' all over it. No Sale.

Keep up your good work.

E. Beisel
Milford, CT

FEEDBACK: TSG#3

Articles were rated on a scale of one (low) to nine (high). The first column after the article name is the total number of one, two, and three votes the article received. The second column is the total number of eight and nine votes the article received. The last column is the average of all 200+ votes received by the time this was tabulated.

Escort Illusion	6	116	7.37
Two Views	12	36	7.05
News/Plugs	2	66	6.83
Where We're Going	12	56	6.34
Tannish #3	28	77	6.34
Tunnels & Trolls	16	48	6.24
Star Probe	10	40	6.18
Ignoring Einstein	12	35	6.09
Siege of Minas T.	13	38	6.06
War of Worlds II	10	26	5.92
Battle of 5 Armies	12	23	5.83
Alien Space	18	22	5.46

We're short space this issue to carry as much as we'd wanted. We're going to revamp Game Ratings completely to give readers a more meaningful guide to how popular a game is based on preferences by game type. We'd also like to revise feedback and have left room on this issue's for your comments. Next issue will cover feedback concepts in general.

One thing to note. Nudity was the most provacative thing we asked last time. We will suffer 1%-2% cancellations if they show up on our pages. However, comments were, well.....

"Sex in merchandising is exploitation, the honest reality of nakedness is art."

"My wife, however, might cut them out."

"She may read it then."

"I'd discontinue my sub, glad your asked."

"You gotta be kidding!"

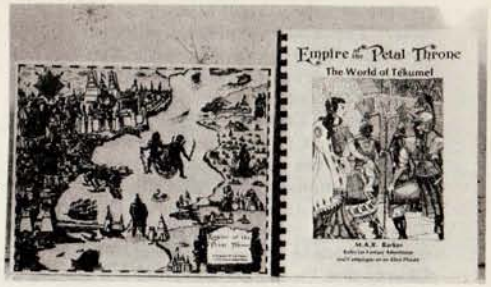
"I read hard-core porno anyway when I want."

"Are you serious?"

"Only if you can find a decent artist."

"My mother? I'm 35 years old!"

EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE
A REVIEW



This is a fantastic new game that has been produced by Tactical Studies Rules for the Fantasy Gamer. This game is based on the planet of Tekumel which was created by M.A.R. Barker who is the author of this game. Mr. Barker has also created a map of the planet, a map of the main city which is Jakalla and a map of the underworld which is on the planet. The author has also created a language and new creatures for adventurers who wish to travel the roads of Tekumel. In effect, what Mr. Barker has done is to create a world with an entire society of its own.

The History of the planet of Tekumel: This planet about the size of Earth and it also swings around a G-type star with four other sister planets. When Tekumel was first discovered by man, it was not habitable for any of the human races. The atmosphere was deadly and the vegetation was poisonous. But, the biggest problems that the human races had to overcome were the non-human races that inhabited the planet which were the Ssu' and their cousins the Hlyss'.

Finally, after many battles, the non-humans that inhabited the planet of Tekumel were subdued. Following this, man began terraforming the planet to make it habitable for himself and his races. Tekumel was thus changed into a copy of most of the other type of planets that are in Human space. The Ssu' and Hlyss' while not totally destroyed by the war were forced to live on reservations set aside for them on the planet. These two races were biding their time until they could get even with the human-kind races.

Then, disaster struck this planet cluster. The stars around the planet went out. Volcanoes, earthquakes, and tidal waves ripped across the planet's surface and panic set in everywhere. No one knew then what had happened, but it is clear now what went on in the cosmos. Through some fault in the fabric of time, the solar system that contained Tekumel was shifted into some other dimension unknown to man. No longer was there any means of communication with the other planets. Commerce between the systems was no longer possible. The Solar System which contained Tekumel and her four sister planets was now in a black void of which there was no return. Human technology, great as it was, had no remedies to return the five planets to their home dimension.

As time went by, men began retrogressing and losing the knowledge to repair the machines that they had. The old machines began to take on a divine aura and those who knew the "magic" of how they operated were considered priests in this new society. Man was moving into barbarism and was forced to adapt to a non-technological environment. Here and there the non-human races began rebelling and moving out of the reservations that were set up for them and taking over other territories. But still the Ssu' and the Hlyss' were not numerous enough to try and beat back the human races.

Out of all of this turmoil, mankind began to worship new gods. Whether these gods were beings of the new dimension or figments of man's imagination, no one knows. But now there are different gods for different types of people to worship. Each god has his own priests and cohorts. Now, people had a choice of gods to worship from the "Five Good Gods" and "Five Bad Gods." The people who knew how to operate the machines were considered priests of these new gods. The priests, because of their knowledge, were considered "magic users" and were given first choice of all art, literature, and other "magical items" that were found on adventures.

This is the world where your adventure will take place. This world has unexplored , buried cities with treasure and unknown dangers. In these underground cities, players will encounter beings which will be protecting the treasures. The adventurer will have to overcome these beings and other unspeakable horrors to gain the treasure he has come for. So, every week adventurers can be seen leaving the capital city of Jakalla to try to gain their fame and fortune.

This is only a brief history of Tekumel. There also evolved a political system, different races, and a Tsolyani code of ethics, none of which I have attempted to cover in this review.

The game EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE: At first glance, because of the size of the rules book, this game seems immense. But, don't be discouraged because the booklet is not all rules. Even though it is 114 pages long, many of these pages are devoted to Charts and Tables that are needed to play the game. Additionally, there are definitions of the sections and the many choices that are open to players when on their adventures.

The rule book is broken into three different sections. Each section adds a new character, condition, or explains how to handle a specific situation. The rules for EPT are complete and every aspect of play is covered in the rules.

EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE is not only a game where single adventures can be played, but it is a game for creating an entire world. With this set of rules, players can go on one adventure, gain their treasure and call it quits; or return to Jakalla and plan further adventures in the future. There is no limit to the number of adventures or the number of players who can be in this game at any one time. All action begins and ends with the players in Jakalla, where the Emperor of the Petal Throne resides.

The graphics that have been employed in this game are the best that I have seen in a long time. There are three main maps done so beautifully that they could be hung on the wall and be displayed with pride. All in all, it can be seen that a lot of work has gone into the physical qualities of the game.

EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE is a fantasy game that will be around for many years to come. The time and work that has gone into this game is readily noticeable and can be appreciated. In the future, Mr. Barker is coming out with some novels that will be centered around this world and its culture that players could use when playing EPT. Every detail that you can imagine is covered in this game. So, if you have enjoyed DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS in the past, then this is the game of the future. EMPIRE OF THE PETAL THRONE is the "now" game for all fantasy gamers. Therefore, don't miss it or you might be missing one of the best games that has ever been designed.

The complete game is available for $25.00 from Tactical Studies Rules; P.O. Box 756; Lake Geneva, WI 53147. Or, if this is too much of a dent into the budget, then the game components may be purchased separately.

Rick Mataka
Brooklyn, NY

GAME REVIEW: SORCEROR

SORCEROR is SPI's first fantasy game and one of the best that this reviewer has seen. SORCEROR portrays wars on an imaginary world, in which "reality was or will be less fixed than we know it." Seven universes meet in this chaotic world, six of which are magical and represented on the map by various colors of magic.

The map is a hexsheet composed of 1" hexes, 25 by 25 hexes. Each hex is white, gray or colored. Towns, artistically depicted as clusters of fantastic buildings, occur only in white hexes and in the Graylands. There are also river and mountain hexsides which pay no attention to color. The interesting names of the towns and terrain features add flavor to the game. Combat and other charts are printed on the map.

The major units in the game are the sorcerors. Each has power in one to three of the colors. Other units in the game are enchanted fortresses, human infantry, trolls, demonic infantry, and air dragons. The last three are magical units conjured by the sorceror by expending movement points, and can be any color.

Movement is sequential. Sorcerors both move (either by teleportation or normal movement) and conjure new units during the movement phase. They also remove pin markers from hexes, fling Magic Bolts (analogous to artillery), restore depleted units to full strength, conjure or destroy vortexes (magical storms of chaos which move randomly), and convert white hexes to colored ones. In the same phase, all magical and human infantry units move also. Movement point costs are paid to leave a hex, rather than to enter it. Magical units must be paid an additional penalty to leave their first colored hex each turn, unless they are assisted by a friendly sorceror. There are no zones of control.

Kenneth Rahman

Between the movement and combat phases, there is a Joint Attrition Phase. Colors are picked randomly, and certain units on hexes of those colors have a chance of becoming depleted (or destroyed if already depleted). This is done randomly. Vortexes also move during this phase, reproducing or being destroyed, depending on the terrain they pass through and attacking everything they hit.

Combat can occur between opposing units in the same hex in the Joint Combat Phase. The combat system takes into account the type (magical or non-magical) of the units on both sides, the color of the units and of the hex, and the combat differential. Units can be pinned, depleted, or destroyed by combat. Enchanted fortresses (and their garrisons) and sorcerors are always the last units in a hex to take losses, and they can never be destroyed in a single combat phase. They must first be depleted, and then destroyed in the next combat phase before they have a chance to recover. Pinned units cannot move or attack until unpinned by a friendly sorceror. In some cases, depletion reduces combat strength; in some cases, movement points.

A total of nine solitaire, two-player and three-player scenarios are included. Some scenarios involve the White or Black sorcerors, which have special rules of their own. There are other special rules for scenarios, such as the Stones of Power. The "historical" descriptions of the scenarios are amusing and worth reading in themselves.

There are many optional rules, such as Cloaks of Invisibility, cloning, assasination attempts, magic flux, and inventing new spells. Some of the suggested spells for players to invent are truly mind-bending, such as time travel, ubiquity, spells of confusion, counter-invisibility, mind control, and more. It goes without saying that there is a risk involved in developing these spells; the sorceror must undergo attack, and he can be killed in one misfired attempt.

All in all, SORCEROR is a very good game. It presents an original fantasy situation in a fascinating and physically beautiful game format. The game is complex, but easy to learn. Scenarios are balanced, and the game employs the right proportion of skill and chance. The game at $9 cost one dollar more than most SPI games and is well worth the extra money for physical quality as well as for playability and enjoyment.

SORCEROR was designed by Redmond Simonsen and is available from Simulations Publications Inc., 44 E 23rd, New York, NY 10010.

Glen Taylor
Landover Hills, MD

REVIEW OF LENSMAN

LENSMAN is a six-year old game--one of the earliest SF games about. It simulates the military and economic conflict between the forces of Civilization, backed by Arisia, and Boskone, controlled by Eddore. It's based, of course, on the famous Lensman series by E.E. "Doc" Smith. It concentrates in particular on the situation portrayed in the third book of the series, Galactic Patrol.

The 46-star map is two dimensional, and is made of thin cardboard. It is strikingly colored, but cannot be folded (which is a pain). The units are plentiful, but are printed on paper and so must be glued to cardboard and cut out. The game comes in three levels: Introductory, with a set order of battle; Basic, with production and colonization rules; and the Tournament game, with a tactical battle board (with moving planets and asteroid belts) where "inert" battle occurs. You must, however make your own battle board. The movement system is simple, but, in this case, accurate. Ship types include scouts, cruisers, dreadnaughts, maulers, transports, and command ships. Various optional rules make cosmic gnerators, Galactic patrol primaries, Q-guns, and hidden movement available.

Although some of the rules are a little vague, the game plays well, if a bit slow, and it exploits the novels well enough to give you that "you are there" feeling. It also has some good ideas that other designers should look long and hard at.

Finally, I should mention that I bought my copy of LENSMAN from Lou Zocchi; 1513Newton Drive; Biloxi, MS 39532. The cost, the last I heard, is $6.00. Spartan charges less, but I don't know their financial position at present. A warning--Zocchi's a nice guy, but he takes 6 weeks to deliver the order.

Scott Rusch
Walden, New York

TRIPLANETARY REVIEW

TRIPLANETARY is a pleasant, fairly simple game of ship-to-ship space combat in interplanetary space. Movement is Newtonian and it is handled well. Orbits and movement are drawn on the plastic-covered map by a grease pencil, which can be messy and which has an unpleasant side effect in an unbendable map. Gravity is fairly well handled, though orbits around the sun are impossible unless you are next to it (but there is no rule for solar radiation, so don't worry). The game is loosely taken from the SF novels and short stories of the 1930's, 40's, and 50's--particularly Heinlein. You have a variety of ships--corvettes, corsairs, frigates, dreadnaughts, torch ships, transports, packets, tankers, and liners. These have combat and fuel factors on them. You spend one fuel factor to accelerate one hex. Only combat ships can accelerate more than this (and only once between refueling). Weapons are nice and conventional--multibarrel machine guns, mines (20 homing missiles launched as a body), torpedoes (deadly and uninterceptable), and nukes (deadly, too, but interceptible). Movement is sequential. The map shows Mercury, Sol, Venus, Terra, Luna, Mars, the Asteroid Belt (way too thick), Jupiter, and three Jovian satellites. Unfortunately, none of these move. It's as if they were islands. The game is two dimensional, which isn't all that bad in this case. There are a goodly number of scenarios, covering everything from a round-the-system race to an alien invasion. You can make plenty more of your own (I have). It's quite a flexible game, and it's fun. It's even fairly accurate, which is something most tactical space games can't claim. I heartily recommend it. You can get it from Game Designer's Workshop; 203 North Street; Normal, Illinois 61761 for $8.00.

Scott Rusch
Walden, New York

ELDON TANNISH: PART IV

((Eldon Tannish is a gifted young gamer competing in a future computer moderated game tournament. "The Game" is a super-sophisticated series of competitive simulations from a variety of scenarios. Eldon has made it through initial qualifying rounds but was almost eliminated in his last game. Eldon's play patterns have apparently become predictable. Bulmar Denholt, nemisis from Eldon's first tournament last year, wouldn't have been able to so easily entrap Eldon's strategy otherwise. On the advice of a novice girlfriend, Alba, Eldon spends an evening with the Game's computer undergoing Problem Analysis. This evaluation can be very helpful to gamers, if, they can find the right questions to ask.))

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No sun greeted Eldon's Alpha meditations this morning. Clouds hid an eight o'clock sun. He'd risen late. A Problem Analysis session with the Game's computer had lasted 'til the midnight maintenance service suspension. He could use a bit of extra sleep. A thorough examination usually took twenty plus hours, but Eldon had accomplished what he could in the one evening available At midnight the Game's computer phalanx of systems engineers ran diagnostic series and did physical repair and maintenance. The central processor and memory itself required no maintenance. Emersed in super-cold liquid helium, the main memory was a half cubic meter of solid exotic substances. All circuitry, as good a name as any, was imprinted by by external magnetic patterns and represented 100 billion characters of storage. The pattern of sub-processors and sensors, nearly a million in number, gave the Game's computer a computational and processing capacity greater than the national annual crop of PHD's. Intelligence quotients indicated a rough equivalence to man's sum knowledge, but sentience was still debated. The meaning of sentience and type of intelligence was in doubt too.

Completing his mental sequences, Eldon decided that thirty minutes of vigorous calesthentics would help shake-off the effects of the evening's efforts. Bringing his body to maximum exertion should facilitate attainment of peak alertness for the day's game. Rapidly working up a sweat, he couldn't help wondering about the message plug briefing for today's game. "Special Scenario" usually meant some type of individual, man-to-man, role playing game. The computer used role games infrequently in tournaments since such games were often used more for pleasure. It could be that the unusually high quality scores of this year's finalists would result in an abnormally grueling and varied series of matches.

Eldon's narrow escape in yesterday's game and subsequent emergency re-evaluation of his playing style indicated a precarious position. If the games were of all varieties, maybe even innovations, then experience was going to count heavily. With role games so infrequent in tournaments, not many masters practiced much. Eldon's, and others', main preparation would have been in non-competitive, social, pleasure sequences, though in this instance pleasure often became challenging. It was almost as if the Game's computer was testing the whole person rather than gaming ability.

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Foul smelling mud covered his knees. Leeches sucked blood and stingers stabbed skin with irritants, yet he dared not move. Snuffles and eager splaches of lupus demi-sapien sounded all around. If only mud and rotting vegetation would cover his odor! Don't gasp for air, breath slowly, can't run again...

Eldon almost felt mud and fear ooze from the holograph. The Game's computer had really brewed a nasty. No empires, armies, and such to direct this time--only an individual role to play. The message plug briefing had said "Special Scenario" and meant it. The rules of role playing games gave an individual no information. Everything you learned watching the holograph and causing actions in the projected simulacrum. You even used your own voice for the simulacrum's speech to other projected entities. When, not if, your projected character was killed, another was started fresh for you all over again. Eleven other players were caught in this scenario with him, and he had no way of knowing who they were when his character met them, unless his fellow-players admitted their identities. Even if a projection admitted to being another player, however, it might just be the computer making its own characters lie.

Eleven minutes and his character hadn't

been killed yet. Laws of nature were somewhat altered and the village he'd come through indicated a high technology collapsed to partial Dark Ages. He'd passed through the village without contact; no one had approached him, yet a hunt had commenced when his simulacrum was barely a mile beyond the gate. Wolves? Those couldn't be normal wolves. One of them had barked and growled into what could only have been a radio headset. Real cut! If the computer wasn't human, it had to be more than human to dream-up some of this stuff.

He kept his character immobile and debated having it slip neck-deep in the mud. The brainy wolves couldn't approach him. They hadn't found his scent, and the bruisers riding horses, well--they looked like horses--didn't seem disposed to dismount. The sky was strange, no sun or clouds, yet murky light. Whatever it was it wasn't a usual dirt and air planet.

One of the mounted pursuers had turned on an artificial hand-light of some sort, but he was moving away from Eldon's spot in the reeds. Since most of the commotion was headed away, he risked moving the simulacrum step by sucking step toward a darker area. Eldon watched intently, trying to observe every detail. In role scenarios the computer kept things moving rapidly. Opportunities and danger abounded and a lot happened in six hours. The goal was to grasp the natural laws and logic underlying the scenario as fast as possible. The scoring awarded players who could rapidly grasp the situation and begin to manipulate it to their advantage, and other's detriment. The more you knew, the more decisively and accurately you acted, the more you gained control of game events. It was impossible to avoid getting killed a few times, so you bought as much information as feasible.

A slithering splash in a fetid pool nearby made Eldon move up the gnarled stump of a swamp "tree." Despite the danger from pursuit, a slight gleam on teeth below told him the danger hunch was right. He moved higher in the "tree" and paused to look about. In one direction, the swamp, and everything else, ended in a shimmering wall about five miles away. While pondering he became aware a vine had somehow entangled legs and hands. Entangled! Wrench! Stuck fast. Green little hopping orinthids began converging on his body from the "tree's" greenery. Shimmering world's edge was the last thing he saw before the holograph faded.

In the moment before, his new simulacrum in the same roving mercenary character role was started again in a new location. Eldon tried to review events. There just wasn't enough data to determine if the "pursuit" had possibly been an attempt to head him off from the swamp. Chances are it wasn't, but pursuit hadn't begun until he was heading toward the swamp. The pursuers had only worked the fringes of undergrowth so they respected the dangers. They may have taken him for a creature of the swamp or had been trying to help him. Fourteen minutes and first death; no way to know if that was good or bad.

The hours passed in a blur. Events demanded such constant attention Eldon was often only vaguely aware he played a game. Since the wretched initial swamp death, his projection had died twice more--once in a deep cave by seeming accident and the other at the hands of a pirate who was almost certainly another player.

The Game's computer had created a series of pocket universes interlinked by matter transmitting portals. Eldon had gathered information about eight separate pockets and, if his hypothesis was accurate, there were no more than twelve total. A thirteenth pocket possibly served as a control node for the entire portal linkages. He'd shed the mercenary role to become a slave dealer in the largest pocket universe. C'heng-Dra was an important trade city and a good source of this world's forgotten knowledge of the portals. The Game's computer had made much of the lost sciences as inscrutable as magic. Eldon guessed he'd finish the game far short of full knowledge. The current crisis manifested itself as a motley horde of neandertoid barbarians camped amongst the ancient ruins outside the city's citadel walls. Trade was halted, cutting him off from the two portals in this universe he could operate. The slave pens of his compound were emptied for defensive labors. The situation was decidedly shaky. Another player probably led the horde or controlled its leaders. Events converging upon C'heng-Dra had weakened Eldon's game, but strengthened his belief that the city was an important game focus. The barbarians' motives were too strange to be coincidental.

Powerful knowledge or devices lay somewhere in C'heng-Dra.

"What wilt thou do, most noble Lord," beseeched Su-Tush, his one remaining concubine.

"Peace, woman!" glared Eldon's simulacrum. "My ill-begetted luck gives thee no leave to query they master!"

"Forgiveness, Lord," she bowed--exquisitely, of course. "Anxiety hath made my foolish tongue impertinent."

"If yon voice-thrower still works, thou mayest ease thy anxieties by again trying to raise Shalmun," directed Eldon. The voice-thrower was, however, powerless, so they continued sorting and packing.

Crack! Flump! Shocking impacts sharded the tower window where they worked for escape. Gusts of air created by leathery reptilian wings scattered papers and objects d'art willy-nilly in the stone room. A glowering neandertoid barbarian saw-reined, viciously trying to heel his mount.

"Ho, city-dung," he burst, "yon bed above you won't stop my pretty's talons."

Eldon's projection ruefully rolled from under the haven bed and faced Shalmun, the very one he'd sought. "Foul lout, you've caused Su-Tush's nubile flesh to swoon," complained Eldon. True enough, the wispily clad girl lay in a faint.

"No harm," boomed Shalmun, crunching antique delicacies with mud-crusted boots. "I warrant thy piteous entreaties wanted me soonest and thy silly toys soon do ye no good."

"Thy brutish kin will ne'er use my property," Eldon boasted with a flourish, for such was his adopted role. "Only their coarse bones will see my house as relics for drunken tales in years to come."

"Hah, if hot air could blow a barbarian, you'd have blown them hence err now. To business, Lord. You need to escape. What can you offer worth the risk of my life?" Shalmun could blather with the best, but also be bluntly to the point as it suited his purpose.

Now the crux: Eldon was almost sure Shalmun was a player who'd opportunistically attached himself to the horde. Su-Tush might also be a player, but he had less evidence. "I suppose you still want Su-Tush," ventured Eldon. Shalmun believed her a player of import and wanted control.

"Aye, that I do, Lad. But not with your devil's curse still on her."

"I'm no lad, as ye well know," parried Eldon. "Who's to protect my life once I release my power from her?" Shalmun called it magic, but Su-Tush had a surgical implant in her thalamus. It was controlled by a voice-keyed device in Eldon's back molar. Hopefully, Shalmun didn't know that or Eldon's teeth might also be forfeit.

"Come now, what say you?" asked Shalmun. "You've naught but reason to trust one as honorable as I."

"I'd as lief trust a starvling snake in a basket of Kranoor eggs as thee," scoffed Eldon. "I'll remand Su-Tush's enchantment as soon as I'm free. Whither she'll with you is her concern then. I'll have no more of her. I'll jump from your repugnant mount with a drop-chute at a safe distance."

"You'd but trick me, thieving slaver!" Shalmun expostulated. "What's to save you from jumping with the curse still on her?"

"I'll lay a command upon her to cut a thong binding me to your saddle only after I've released her spell."

Shalmun pondered briefly and nodded asent with a scowl. No scheme could be perfect in these harried circumstances But, this would give each a fair chance if he stayed alert. Eldon spoke the binding spell, relayed of course from his molar to Su-Tush's thalamic implant and they were off on Shalmun's winged lizard with minimal baggage.

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That's the last 'discount' flying spell
I'll ever buy!

ELDON TANNISH--50 YEARS OR 5

The general concept of Eldon Tannish's future game world was left deliberately vague to leave froom for future flexibility. But, it was meant to be some fifty or so years in the future after a limited nuclear exchange. The basic technology was advanced computer systems and holographic display of games as they were played. Since the intent was not to tie things down to early details, The Game, Eldon, and the technology was about all that was needed. The only hang-up is the fifty-year time frame.

Anyone who dabbles with psychology even a little is aware that the subconscious mind will play little tricks on you. You know when you stumble over it later with a sense of deja vu. What you thought of as coincidence or having happened before was really your subconscious mind sorting and dredging up ideas on its own while you weren't paying attention to it. The Eldon story's technology falls into that category. When doing a bit of research for this brief background piece, it became apparent that what I had in mind for Eldon fifty years from now was no more than collected fragments of science readings in the last year or so. The only thing not technologically possible for The Game right now is the computer tie-in to a holographic display. It's not possible because the "holovision" of s-f stories is only in the stages of early development. The necessary speed and memory sizes for computers is already here, albeit in maybe the Gray-1 machine only. Dr. Gray now has his own company to build the Gray-1 which is five to six times faster than the CDC 7600 he designed.

Super fast, large, cheap computer core memory is only a few years away from testing. That means a memory the size of a billion characters or storage accessible at speeds an order of magnitude faster than human brain functions. That much memory and speed will certainly be able to 'drive' a holographic display of a computer game in progress. So, Eldon's world could technically happen in the early 1980's.

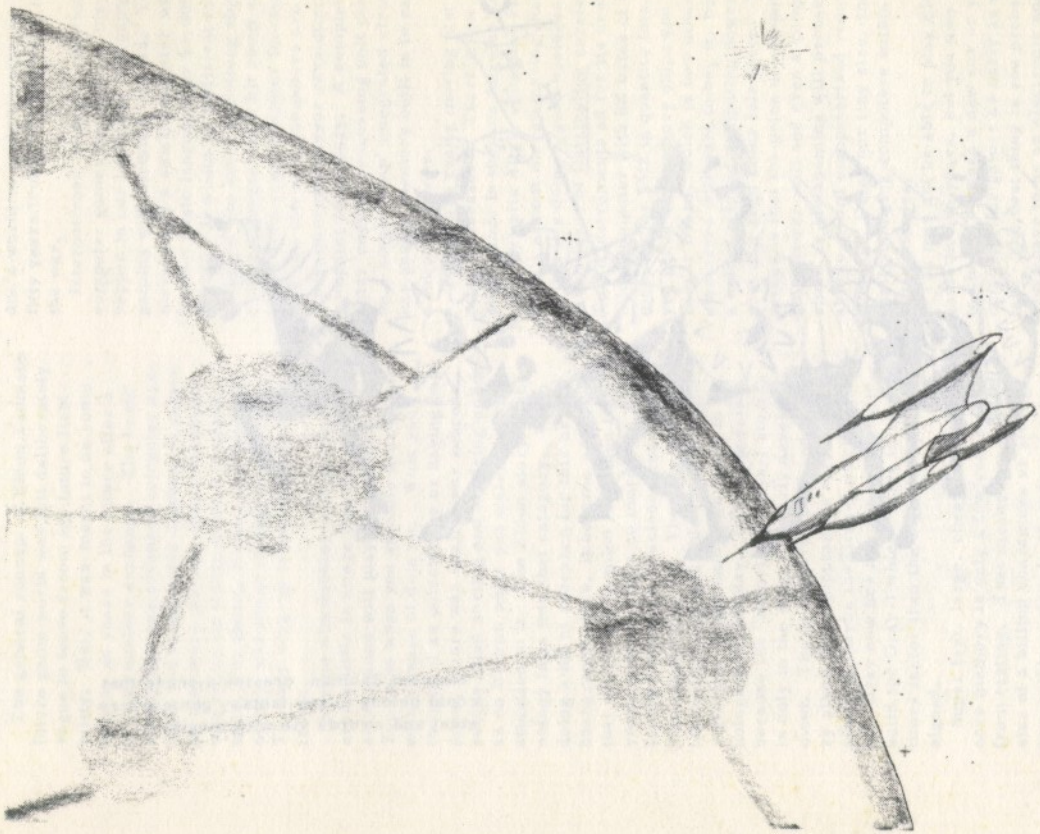
It could, but it won't. It won't because it will take millions of dollars to achieve, 10 to 100 million, I'd guess. No company will be able to afford to develop and advertise the thing to a point of breaking even. The cost may come down enough in decades for it to be done. So, Eldon's world is probably still out there fifty years from now, hopefully minus the war.

International, super-sophisticated computer games competition may not happen in our life time, but computer gaming will certainly spread. You can already buy a small computer with a limited basic language for $3,000 to $5,000. It would be sufficient for small games if you know something about machine languages and a bit about electronics to keep your computer functioning. The new low cost computers are part of a new microprocessor revolution in computer technology. A complete computer central processing unit now fits on a single 'chip' integrated circuit and has enough memory built in to carry out a lot of functions.

Things are really moving fast with microprocessors. There's now a computer store in the Los Angeles area that actually sells Altair computer kits. What's almost more amazing than that is that it's doing a good business. The latest issue of Datamation carries a Texas Instruments ad for its new 990/4 microcomputer with 8K bytes of 16 bit memory for $512 in quantity lots. All you get is the memory chips and processor board, which is how other manufacturers will want to buy it, but that's a hell of a lot of computing power for the cost of a good color television. What it means is that the price of computing is going lower still and even a company as small as Metagaming will probably be able to afford computerized record-keeping. Given our tiny size, that's really bringing computers within reach of the masses.

You may not be able to play Eldon's game in five years, but you may be able to choose between a new car or your own computer for games as early as next fall. The best thing is you probably won't have to be an electronic engineer to keep the thing working, nor a genius in computer design to program it. Now if you hook up a telephone coupling device, tie in some of your friends on terminals over the phone in the same city and..... Well, you'd certainly be a popular gamer-about-town, to say the least.

Kenneth Rahman creates a scene that could belong to any fantasy game where steel and swords vie with magic.



John Hricz